

As a long-time Enforcement Officer of the MI FOC, Family Circuit Court, I can testify truly that **the only acceptable scenario for children of divorced parents is to have both the parents remain actively involved and empowered in the upbringing of the children**. From a purely practical standpoint, children need the influence of a working father who has the power of consistent *respect and discipline* in their lives in order to graduate high school and go on to become successful citizens and contributing adults.

Since the 1970's, children of divorcing parents were assumed better off in the custody of the mother, while the father was given the role of providing child support with brief and formal dates of "visitation." It became common to see children of college-educated [divorced] parents dropping out of junior-high school, becoming pregnant and immersing themselves in the drug culture [or some other counter-culture]. These teens went on to become a burden rather than an asset to society. This is not a politically correct statement; however, it is truth. Fathers who must battle against the mother and the Court just to be able to spend time with the children, are neither respected nor empowered to provide discipline or guidance. A parent who is only awarded the role of *Payer* while never being given the respect or power to be a fully-involved parent is more likely to drop out of his children's lives. Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau bear this out.

The best way to be certain that the children receive the input and discipline of both interested parents is to believe that both parents have a necessary role in modeling and mentoring, and to assume that children should benefit by having both parents share *equally* in the parenting process. If parents are divorced, the only way to encourage co-operation and respect between the adults is to keep both parents equally vested. Even a "bad" parent is usually better than no parent in most cases. In joint-custody, there is a great deal of accountability and a system of checks and balances that promotes a good working relationship rather than sniping, anger and bitterness between the parents. Parents who are expected to reason together find a way to make it work when the Court is not representing one side unfairly over the other. It isn't credible to assume that a non-custodial parent will have the same influence, example or power that a custodial parent will have. There are ways that a custodial parent can render the non-custodial parent impotent in the parenting role, and this effective form of manipulation is learned early on and rewarded in the adversarial model that is prevalent in today's Family Court in Michigan.

With joint physical and legal custody, children may not enjoy the transition that they must make between two households, but abuse is less likely, because both parents can be available and watchful for signs of neglect or foul play. Relatives and grandparents on both sides can remain active, available and helpful to the children. Less often is one parent so disrespected or bitter that he/she quits paying/disappears.

I have my Master's Degree in child psychology; I was a former FOC Enforcement Officer; I was also a single mother of three for many years, and I know how to play the system as well as how the system can work for or against each member of the family. I have discovered the formula -for children of divorce- that transitions them to finish school or training and become successful citizens. I believe that joint physical and legal custody is the most fair and advantageous method of parenting for children of divorce. Not only do the children benefit exponentially from having two equally-involved parents, but society wins as well.

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